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ABC RADIO

Australian
Broadcasting
Corporation

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Sydney 2011

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OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT

BACKGROUND BRIEFING - 28, 29, 30 OCTOBER 1990

BROADCAST ON ABC RADIO NATIONAL

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REPORT FROM THE MOUNTAINS OF EAST TIMOR; INTERVIEW WITH RESISTANCE GUERILLA COMMANDER, SHANANA GUSMAO

LIZ JACKSON:

Hullo and welcome to the tenth anniversary program of Background Briefing. I'm Liz Jackson. Today, an exclusive report from the mountainous interior of East Timor, which was invaded and forcibly incorporated into Indonesia in 1975. Australia stood by and watched a large nation invade a small neighbour, without lifting a finger. No frigates were dispatched then to aid the Timorese.

Six Australian journalists who went to cover the situation were murdered by Indonesian troops. In the fifteen years since then, no outsider has made the hazardous trek through the jungles of East Timor to speak directly with the resistance fighters. Indeed, Indonesia has long claimed that the resistance has been crushed.

But last month Background Briefing sent Robert Domm to seek out the guerillas. He was taken by the Timorese underground, under the very noses of the Indonesian army, to a meeting with the leader of the East Timorese resistance, Shanana Gusmao.

Robert Domm presents this exclusive report. The program was conceived and produced by Mark Aarons.

ROBERT DOMM: This is Robert Domm reporting for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation from the Military Headquarters of the Armed Resistance to Indonesian occupation of East Timor. The Headquarters is situated deep in the hills of East Timor, and for the first time in 15 years since Indonesia invaded in 1975, I'm talking to the commander of the Falintil, the armed forces of the Resistance. Good evening Mr Shanana.

SHANANA GUSMAO: Good evening.

ROBERT DOMM: My first question to you sir is, if you are able to do so simply, describe the current military situation in East Timor?

QUESTION FADES HALF WAY THROUGH, UNDER

ROBERT DOMM: Over the last twenty years I've visited East Timor on a number of occasions, both when it was a Portuguese colony and soon after it was 'opened up' by Jakarta in January 1989. So I knew something of the people and their difficult situation.

But the countless stories I heard on this trip were chilling. People in the streets told me of massacres, torture and forced relocation from their traditional villages into concentration camps.

Yet according to the Indonesian government, the situation is now normal in East Timor and the resistance belongs to the past. But like other recent visitors I found it one of the most

abnormal societies I've ever been to. I'd been told to expect a lot of resistance, but the extensive underground surprised me.

In the towns and countryside hundreds of people were involved in the operation to smuggle me into the mountains. In the bush there were people everywhere, protecting us at every stage, scouting ahead to ensure that we got to the guerillas' base camp and returned safely.

There are over 10,000 troops in that tiny country and we had to pass through them everywhere. It was only the local civilians who saved our skins. The few guerillas I travelled with couldn't have protected me from the Indonesian troops.

To meet with Shanana Gusmao we had to secretly leave Dili and travel by car for many hours. We then walked for perhaps 20 kilometres through the rugged mountains. Finally, when I thought I was done for, one of the guerillas pointed and said 'we're very close now, it's just up ahead'.

I looked up and saw this mini-Matterhorn covered with jungle and totally inaccesible. From where we stood you wouldn't have known anyone was there, let alone how to get up it.

By the time we reached the camp I was exhausted, climbing on my hands and knees. Suddenly Shanana appeared from nowhere, and I scrambled up, shook his hand and said 'it's been a long time, sir, 15 years'. The history of the moment struck me immediately.

We'd had to climb this mountain, struggling to the top, exhausted and dripping with perspiration. That last climb epitomised their difficulties. For 15 years no outsider had got to them and they seemed like a lost tribe. But once the interview got underway, I realised that the guerilla commander was an extremely intelligent and sophisticated man.

ROBERT DOMM: How well organised is the underground in the towns, the resistance underground and how does it work?

SHANANA GUSMAO: We can't define with clarity how the underground works, since this would harm the resistance. But at this moment the underground is at an unsurpassed level, for which we've been striving for the past 15 years.

There are popular organisations at almost every concentration camp - even in Oe Cusse and at Suai, Bobonaro, Maliana, Liquica and Ermera, areas where at this time we don't have a military presence. When we talk about concentration camps we mean not only the small villages that are further into the countryside, but also the towns and even Dili, which is the centre of clandestine activities.

The enemy knows this, it's not a secret. The level of the underground organisation enables us to say once more that if

Jakarta continues to be inflexible the war will not end so soon.

ROBERT DOMM: It was this underground that organised my trip into the mountains. A civilian messenger guided us to a pre-arranged point where we met the armed security unit assigned to escort me through the mountains. They'd arranged a formal reception and presention of arms.

My first impression was that they were somewhat sloppy. It was like they'd sent a younger version of Dad's Army out to protect me. But once in the mountains I realised how wrong I'd been.

These men are clearly guerilla soldiers. They don't march up and down in military parades. But they're highly skilled at travelling rapidly through the mountains. They seemed a formidable force, capable of seizing the best vantage points to attack the Indonesians.

SHANANA GUSMAO: In the current situation the guerillas try to minimise their great difficulties. After 15 years, obviously everyone understands that without any support from outside, Falantil can't think about great military successes. The enemy's current tactic is to suffocate us with constant military action, and we try to neutralise and accommodate each attack that the enemy unleashes against us.

ROBERT DOMM: How do the Indonesian troops conduct their operations against the Resistance?

SHANANA GUSMAO: Every offensive which the enemy launches is aimed at our extermination. It doesn't have any other purpose. If we go back to the guerilla warfare period in 1981, Indonesia launched an offensive in which it used almost all the people of East Timor.

In 1983 to 84 they used their entire arsenal - war ships, tanks, airplanes, mortars, cannons - in battalions which we got tired of counting. Later, in 1986 to 87 they used elite troops, special forces in counter insurgency warfare, when they began to use 'territorial guerilla warfare'. This doesn't involve a great number of military personnel, but well defined planning and well defined periods of time, during which they spread their forces out completely in small groups.

In 1988, they launched a new offensive, again with a big military force, but since then Indonesia has reduced the number of military personnel and are using Timorese conscripts for counter insurgency.

ROBERT DOMM: How, in fact, did they use the population?

SHANANA GUSMAO: They cover an entire area with the people, and then attack another area. Then they move and in this way they

practically cover everywhere. The population is used to cover the terrain, so that they push us into the Indonesian troops and force us to clash with them. For instance, if they thought we were in this mountain, they'd mobilise all the population of the local concentration camps to make a circle which would advance on us. The Indonesian troops would then begin their push, and if we didn't escape in time we'd clash with them.

ROBERT DOMM: What are the current tactics applied by the Indonesian troops? How do they conduct their operations now?

SHANANA GUSMAO: Now they're using territorial counter insurgency, in which they launch small groups in every direction in a particular area, so that we're constantly in armed clashes with them. They also use larger forces where there are bigger guerilla forces, supported by counter insurgency troops. Counter insurgency has the following features: it spreads out in a large area; it has a fantastic capacity for mobility, so that they can very quickly detect our presence. This makes it very difficult for us to take initiatives, because we don't have a permanent, fixed enemy. It has no real volume or quantity, and we don't know what to confront. We feel that the enemy is everywhere; we even say that we carry them in our bags.

ROBERT DOMM: The clearest sign that the war continues unabated is the massive presence of Indonesian troops. Although tourists see them everywhere, I actually had to move undetected through their lines in the bush. They were extremely well camouflaged and although I couldn't see them, the guerillas spotted them.

They're helped by a network of civilians who sustain the guerillas in their daily battles. But for ordinary Timorese, the cost is very high. While I was there, the Indonesians formed a new death squad, called the 'Ninja', which dresses in black hoods and kidnaps suspects in the night.

ROBERT DOMM: Mr Shanana, what effect does the war between your troops and the Indonesians have on the civilian population?

SHANANA GUSMAO: I would say an horrendous effect, since the war has caused so many deaths, and so much suffering to our people. All the atrocities you hear about outside are only a very, very small part of what actually happens in East Timor. But since the peoples' resistance continues, this is the war's true effect.

Timorese women feel even more oppressed than men. There are so many cases of disrespect to women - violations, abuses, threats. Many women gave their lives for their honour, others were subjugated by force. An entire platoon raping a woman, sexually abusing her until she's almost dead. Many gave their lives, others preferred a bullet to dishonour, while others couldn't resist.

This is a bestial attitude, they are assassins, inhuman and

everything that is Timorese is to be destroyed, violated, oppressed and killed.

ROBERT DOMM: What is your estimation of the number of civilians who have been killed in the last 15 years? There have been reports in Australia that maybe 100,000 civilians, or people, have died through fighting and through famine and disease?

SHANANA GUSMAO: I believe that it is more than 200,000.

ROBERT DOMM: Can you give me an estimation of how many casualties the Indonesian troops have suffered during that time?

SHANANA GUSMAO: I cannot give you an exact figure, because we cannot count the number of enemy soldiers in all our clashes. When we take the initiative and their dead are inside our circle, then we can immediately count them. Usually the Indonesians are careful to take their dead away in helicopters and we don't know where they're all buried. What we do know is that the number of Indonesian military cemeteries is constantly growing. To make an estimate of Indonesian deaths, we could say between 25 and 30 thousand.

ROBERT DOMM: Mr Xanana can you describe for me the difficulties of conducting a war of resistance in East Timor, given the communication problems which you have and the problems associated with the difficult terrain, the mountains?

SHANANA GUSMAO: The question is interesting, in the sense that communications are very important. We don't have any means to enable us to quickly have a total view of the military situation throughout the country. We use several groups of guerillas for communication purposes. This has many difficulties - delays because of lack of food, because there are battles along the way, or because the enemy attacks the point where 2 groups planned to meet.

Militarily, this has been our big problem, but we somehow managed to overcome it, by allowing each group to take their own initiatives according to the conditions prevailing there, but within general planning.

Lately, we've had even more difficulties because of the enemy's use of territorial counter insurgency - the launching of small groups in all possible directions in a given zone. But the clandestine organisations have been able to warn us in advance. We must be the only guerilla army in the world with so many difficulties in all aspects - our own subsistence, health care and our capacity to maintain adequate human resources.

But it's our political motivation that sustains us in this war. It's too great for us to lose, our morale is unshakeable and this allows us to overcome all our difficulties. In such a small territory, surrounded by sea on all sides and with a naval

blockade imposed by the enemy, you can understand our difficulties.

The fact that we've resisted for 15 years now and we're still able to cry out that we are determined to win, it's because our people demand this, our homeland asks us. I believe that everyone would understand that for us the great difficulties are not really felt, they only strengthen our unity, our determination to search for new methods to face up to these difficulties.

Mr Robert, you can't see these great difficulties, because here my men wear good civilian clothes sent by our parents, brothers and sisters, our children who are in the underground resistance.

Without sanctuaries, our guerillas are very mobile, in the whole sense of that word. Without even the minimum capacity to supply ourselves with weapons and ammunition, without the capacity to create production zones to supply ourselves, without the minimum conditions to create some piece of land, a small factory to make our own clothing, you can understand our great difficulties.

ROBERT DOMM: Shanana Gusmao seemed strangely out of place in the mountains, living a deprived life and hunted daily by a relentless enemy. You'd expect to find him drinking coffee and discussing politics in a sidewalk cafe in Lisbon.

He was gentle and humorous, but also very hard and strict. He seemed to be cut in the mold of the classic guerilla leader - an intellectual but also a soldier.

Meeting him I could understand the reverence in which ordinary Timorese hold him. He's a living symbol of their resistance. Shanana is there in the mountains, and the Indonesians haven't been able to capture him in fifteen years.

Despite all their best efforts, their sophisticated American technology and thousands of troops, he survives to mount attacks against them.

The people in the towns believe there's hope in the hills, it's not all bleak. They haven't been totally subjugated because their leader is in the mountains. They see him as a beacon, keeping the flame of freedom alive. Holding aloft the banner of what they call 'Maubere' nationalism.

ROBERT DOMM: Can you explain how important to you are the Timorese students? Can you describe how they are organised, and can you indicate the importance to you of the recent demostrations which they've organised?

SHANANA GUSMAO: These students are of great significance, but

it's not very convenient for us to talk about the way they're organised. However, they're completely organised and mobilised to take practical actions in the struggle. This is based on their patriotic consciousness, which is in the blood of the Maubere people.

Because it's in our blood, it's not lost, and I think the whole world can understand the phenomenom of Maubere nationalism. It's not our propaganda, it's not an ephemeral, temporary phenomenom but it's in the soul of the people, transmitted from parents to children.

The children at the time of the invasion directly suffered the horrors of the war. They saw their parents being massacred, they saw their mothers being maltreated, their relatives and friends. Many of them lived in the mountains for many, many years. Others were under enemy control from the very beginning.

It's inevitable that a youngster who sees his father massacred should feel hatred towards the assassin. It's obvious that a youth who witnessed these atrocities can't alienate himself from the whole situation in which we all live.

Today's students participate in clandestine organisations from years 3, 4 and 5 of highschool. For those born during this criminal occupation, the situation might be a bit different, in that they didn't witness the horrors of the war - the bombardments, the battles, the long marches made in the forests and mountains. But the war didn't end with the loss of our bases in the mountains.

The difficult situation in which the people live under enemy control creates in the children a perception of the injustice of this criminal situation, which affects their own relatives, their neighbours and friends. And they're listening and understanding that in the final analysis it affects the entire Maubere people.

ROBERT DOMM: Well what have been the main changes in the traditional way of life?

SHANANA GUSMAO: There've not been a lot of changes. I would say there've been a lot of difficulties for the people to continue their customs and traditions. The Indonesian occupier has been exploiting what they see as Maubere identity, presenting folklore to tourists and foreign delegations. They think that the Maubere identity only resides in cultural manifestations.

This is a failed policy, because the traditional way of life of our people has changed radically in the sense that it was radically prevented. Our people are essentially rooted to their culture and traditions, they have their own concepts of life, of existence and live to realise them. They're impregnated spiritually and existentially with these concepts.

They conceive their passage through Mother Earth as a temporary time, ephemeral, in which they have to realise their traditional concepts. Our people are profoundly attached to Mother Earth. All their acts, cultural manifestations, and even life, are destined to consecrate, to honour, to worship Mother Earth as life.

There haven't been a lot of changes to this. What happened was that obstacles have been placed in the way of realising these traditions.

ROBERT DOMM: What role does the Catholic Church play in East Timor today? And do you see the Church as being important to the resistance fight?

SHANANA GUSMAO: It's very important, even though from outside it might be difficult to fully appreciate it. The Catholic Church in East Timor has played an essentially moral role in regard to the popular resistance. This almost unseen action is felt deeply by our people, because it supports our resistance.

The clergy play an indirect role, strengthening patriotic consciousness and increasingly the people have an enormous trust in the Catholic Church. They feel that it isn't isolated from their suffering, but in solidarity with them. Many priests have been threatened with shooting, for example Father Joao de Deus. Father Locatelli has been interrogated and beaten up many times.

We don't think they'll be able to remove the priests, or force them to quit their responsibility to their people and homeland. We don't think that the Indonesian government can convince the Vatican to expel all the Timorese priests.

ROBERT DOMM: Can I ask you, sir, to comment on the attitude of the Vatican towards East Timor?

SHANANA GUSMAO: It's an attitude which betrays a corruption of universal principles. We see the Vatican's role in Jakarta's policies. We all know about the expulsion of Monsignor Lopes, and the expulsion of the Portuguese priests and we expect that one day Monsignor Belo will also be expelled. I think that it's an immoral attitude on the Vatican's part and that they're acting in their own political interests.

The statement by Father Tucci who came to prepare the Pope's visit is very revealing. He stated that the Vatican shouldn't sacrifice its interests for the sake of a few hundred thousand Catholics. I don't think that is the most correct attitude. We continue to feel Jakarta's influence on the Vatican and in consequence the influence the Vatican exerts on the Church of East Timor.

ROBERT DOMM: As I slept fitfully in Shanana's simple, but well protected mountain camp, I heard the guerillas listening to short

wave broadcasts on their modern radios.

The irony of their situation struck me. For fifteen years they've had no voice to the world, yet daily they hear everything that's happening outside.

ROBERT DOMM: Mr Shanana, we may turn now to world events events, international events, and firstly I'd like to ask you what do you think of the changes in Eastern Europe, and the impact of those changes on East-West relations?

SHANANA GUSMAO: I think that the impact will be positive. The changes taking place in Eastern Europe strengthen humanity's aspirations for democracy and freedom. It's an undeniable proof that universal values must be respected by everyone, everywhere.

The confrontation between East and West caused the division of the world into two camps. The Iron Curtain is now destroyed and I think that the Iron Gates that continue to imprison people will also be destroyed soon.

The Cold War was replaced by a climate which strengthens dialogue and in this regard, my personal opinion is that the world is moving towards an era of true peace, a new era of freedom, justice and democracy.

ROBERT DOMM: Can we turn to the Baltic republics - Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia - which are seeking independence from the Soviet Union? Can you comment on that situation?

SHANANA GUSMAO: We think that there is some similarity with that situation to ours on questions of principle, because if principles are universal, then they must benefit everyone. It also demonstrates to the world that the phenomenom of nationalism is a fundamental political question belonging to all peoples.

We understand it's difficult for the Soviet Union, in the face of the threat of dismembering the Union. But Moscow can't suffocate and continue to deny the nationalist desire for independence on the part of the Baltic republics, as well as others in the Soviet Union.

We can only comment on the universality of rights, and we must say that it's further proof that these rights must be respected and implemented, otherwise there'd be no people that could feel free. For example, the Kuwaiti people would feel coerced into allowing others to decide their destiny.

ROBERT DOMM: What are your views on the crisis in the Persian Gulf, or the Middle East, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait?

SHANANA GUSMAO: What emerges is the concern by the international community to put an end to disrespect of universal principles. It's a demonstration that there's hope for a more concerted

effort on the part of the international community in regard to the fate of the people of the world.

It shows a prompt disposition by the international community to condemn energetically and immediately a violation of universal principles, which the United Nations advocates and the international community shares.

ROBERT DOMM: But despite Shanana's optimism, most Timorese feel isolated and abandoned. They believe the world has betrayed them.

ROBERT DOMM: What do you think of international attitudes towards East Timor?

SHANANA GUSMÀO: Some attitudes are ambiguous, others irresponsible. In regard to the United States we think it's an attitude of selfishness. This derives from their economic interests in Jakarta. America considers itself to be the bastion of universal values and human rights, yet it makes a distinction between peoples and rights.

America's position today in regard to Kuwait is totally different to its position on East Timor. The Soviet Union in our view behaved on the basis of its own world interests.

ROBERT DOMM: Can you explain to me, sir, what types of military equipment the Indonesian troops use against the Resistance?

SHANANA GUSMAO: They use Bronco OV-10s, Skyhawks, and Tigers. The Indonesian troops also use these guns.

ROBERT DOMM: I might just explain for the tape that Mr Shanana is showing me an automatic rifle and it's been captured from the Indonesian troops, and on the side of the rifle it has the words: "Property of US Government, M-16A1 Calibre 5.5 6mm and the serial number is 532 0696" and the rifle is made by Colts Firearms, Colt Industries, Hartford, Conneticut, USA. Actually, this is a semi-automatic.

ROBERT DOMM: Shanana believes the superpowers have failed to live up to their commitments in regard to East Timor. However, given their historical connections with Australia, they feel especially betrayed by Canberra's policies.

AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER BOB HAWKE: Australia has important interests in the Gulf, but also it's important for Australia that the world understands that big countries cannot invade small neighbours and get away with it.

MARK AARONS: What do you say, Senator Evans, to those who would point to Australia's international obligations that we shouldn't be recognising territory acquired by anyone by force?

AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN MINISTER, GARETH EVANS: Well, we don't accept

that there's any international legal obligation not to recognise acquisitions of that kind. And, of course, that's a matter that may well prove to be an issue if the question of the Timor Gap Treaty is ever litigated in an international court. And I want to make it clear that we don't recognise, as I say, any such legal obligation. What I can say is simply that the world is a pretty unfair place, that its littered over the course of the decades and the centuries with examples of acquisitions by force which have proved to be, for whatever reason, irreversible.

SHANANA GUSMAO: Australia has been an accomplice in the genocide perpetrated by the occupation forces, because the interests which Australia wanted to secure with the annexation of East Timor into Indonesia are so evident. The best proof is the Timor Gap Agreement. It's inconceivable that a democratic country with a Western way of life, a country which claims to be a defender of human rights should profit from our blood.

We're a small neighbouring people who don't forget our important role in Australia's defence, when many Timorese died so that the Japanese wouldn't invade Australia. So it's an attitude of true betrayal.

ROBERT DOMM: The Timorese are especially angry about the Timor Gap Treaty between Australia and Indonesia. They recall Australia telling them in the 1970s that they were too poor to have their independence. Yet now we've carved up their oil and gas reserves with Jakarta.

SHANANA GUSMAO: I think that it's an illegal decision, illegitimate and criminal, in the context that we're being exterminated by a party to this agreement. Australia, with this Treaty becomes an accomplice.

Australia talks loudly about international law, but we can only explain this agreement as a disrespect for principles. There's a principle which says that no acquisition by force is legal. As far as I know Australia is also a signatory to this principle, but denies this with its agreement with Jakarta.

It shows the dirty, cynical and criminal policies practiced by the Australian government in regards to East Timor. We feel betrayed that a country with Western values should profit from our peoples' blood by participating in this rapacious exploitation of something that is in fact legitimately ours.

ROBERT DOMM: It is often said that things have improved more in fifteen years in East Timor under Indonesian rule than in 400 years under Portuguese rule. It's said that there are better schools, better roads, better housing, improved farming methods and improved health facilities. Do you believe this is true, and do you believe that the Timorese are pleased or satisfied by such developments?

SHANANA GUSMAO: This is the enemy's strong propaganada point and we hear him talking about this quite often in international forums. We can't deny that there've been improvements in those aspects you pointed out. However, there never was any real desire on the part of the Indonesians to help the East Timorese. This is a strategy on the part of Jakarta to subjugate the people. There aren't any material benefits which could compensate for our sacrifices. As I've already said, our people have a concept of life which they want to realise while they're alive, in the context of their traditions and customs. That's why a paved road and some houses have no value for them. The Maubere people have their own sense of honour and pride in themselves. Material benefits are only to satisfy daily needs and aren't an end in themselves. So our people not only don't benefit from the material improvements, but these are in conflict with their own concepts of life, with their way of living in the economic sphere.

ROBERT DOMM: When I asked Shanana about prospects for a settlement to the protracted war, he seemed resigned yet determined. The Indonesians' only response to his proposals is to send in more troops to try to kill his guerillas.

But there's a large reserve of people waiting to go to the mountains if they're called on. As far as I could tell, the resistance will go on indefinitely unless the Indonesians show flexibility. Shanana's message to the world was to pressure Jakarta for a peaceful resolution.

ROBERT DOMM: Mr Shanana, many people may argue that while what has happened in East Timor may be unfortunate, it is now impossible for East Timor to be independent. Realistically, how likely is it that you can achieve your goals, and how long are you prepared to suffer the deprivations of a guerilla life in the bush?

SHANANA GUSMAO: Realistically it's not appropriate for me to tell you here whether I think it's possible for us to achieve independence. We are geared towards the defence of our rights and realistically, all our people desire that. If many people argue that it's impossible for East Timor to be independent at the moment, I think they see the question in a simplistic way.

The problem of East Timor is not so simple for Indonesia and the world. We're prepared to continue to resist for as long as necessary, as long as Jakarta doesn't adopt a more flexible, just and responsible attitude.

We're prepared to accept our own extermination, as long as Jakarta thinks that there's only one way to solve the problem, that there exists only the use of force to make us surrender. So only after Jakarta shows more flexibility can I more realistically comment on how we could achieve independence.

ROBERT DOMM: What are your proposals for a solution in East Timor? Would you be prepared to compromise, for example, to gain autonomy within Indonesia and yet be free to run internal affairs, with Jakarta running other matters like foreign affairs and defence?

SHANANA GUSMAO: I can't comment on that since I'm only one person, and the leadership of the struggle involves Falintil, as well as the nationalist parties. Many proposals have been sent to the world, but none was responded to. I can only say that I'm ready to discuss any project for a solution without preconditions, and under the auspices of the United Nations.

Obviously, nothing could take place here if there was no cease fire because there would be physical threats to us. So the only essential condition to discuss proposals for a solution is a ceasefire.

LIZ JACKSON:

The voice of Shanana Gusmao, commander of the Falintil resistance forces, speaking with Robert Domm in the mountains of East Timor.

Shanana's proposal for UN supervised negotiations seems a modest one and it may become harder for the Indonesians to ignore it. The international community regards the occupation of East Timor as illegal, and has asked the UN to resolve the issue. The UN and Portugal are both proposing missions to East Timor as a first step, but the Indonesian Foreign Minister indicated just last Thursday that unless the Portuguese and the foreign press ceased their campaign of 'slander and misinformation', the missions might be off.